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ABSTRACT

Popular opinion suggests that teaching is a stressful profession. A dissenting view is supported in this investigation of women teachers in five Canadian provinces. Self-report attitudinal questionnaires containing 26 items were mailed to a sample of 940 elementary and secondary school principals in eight Western and Eastern Canadian provinces. Each principal was instructed to give questionnaires to two female teachers on the staff. Eleven hundred and twenty-eight (60%) questionnaires were returned. Findings indicated that the magnitude of perceived stress seems to be inversely proportional to years of experience and is statistically related most often to the pressures of work. Most women teachers do not use their income to purchase compensatory home-making services, but the limited results of this study did not support the original expectation that the purchase of home-making services per se reduces stress in women teachers. A tentative conclusion is made that anxiety is intrinsic to the individual and is relatively unaffected by a variety of activities commonly believed to moderate stress. A 22-item list of references and five tables of data are included. (Author/JD)

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Popular opinion suggests that teaching is a highly stressed profession. Hiebert's recent dissenting view is supported in this investigation of women in five provinces. The magnitude of perceived stress seems to be inversely proportional to years of experience and is statistically related most often to the pressures of work. Most women teachers do not use their income to purchase compensatory home-making services. A tentative conclusion is made that anxiety is intrinsic to the individual and is relatively unaffected by a variety of activities commonly believed to moderate stress.

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COPING PATTERNS AND STRESS IN WOMEN TEACHERS

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Partly in jest, but with a disturbingly thoughtful undertone, Morrow's (1981) TIME Magazine article, "The Burnout of Almost Everyone", exemplified much of the popular feeling about the effects of stress and the likelihood of burnout in the helping professions. Opinion articles readily available to teachers in school staff rooms have suggested that they are highly stressed and in chronic danger. This impressionistic view is in contrast to good emerging data based research exemplified by Hiebert (1985) that teaching is only a moderately distressed profession on a par with nursing (Clyne, 1983). Indeed, Hiebert and Eby (in press) found that a sample of grade 12 students in a typical suburban high school exhibit at least as many symptoms of stress as teachers. Nonetheless, teachers can and do break down! The victims may be men or women, young or old, married or single, rural or urban, in small schools or large, and working with either elementary or secondary level students. Included may be college students, farmers, company presidents, and the unemployed! The ways in which individuals in various occupations perceive, experience and cope with stress are only beginning to emerge. Hiebert and Farber (1984) have suggested that much of the misunderstanding about whether education is stressful in comparison to other helping professions stems from the fact that 70% of the publications on teacher stress are opinion-based. Our own data-based research with elementary principals revealed that they report that about 27% of their own teachers showed significant signs of job-related stress. Hiebert's recent C.E.A. report: "Stress and Teachers--The Canadian

Scene", provided an excellent discussion of this issue and identified three theoretical models in current use. The first is the environmental model in which significant stress-inducing situations are identified, the underlying assumption being that if conditions in the personal or work environment are changed, anxiety would decrease. But as we know, a social demand can be important in shaping a person's thoughts, feelings and actions "while not necessarily being a source of stress" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 238). Different people respond in different ways to the same situation. The second response model focuses upon the idiosyncratic reactions, somatic, psychological, and physiological of stressed individuals, who must be taught to react differently to demanding situations. The final interactional model emphasizes that "what functions as a stressor for one person may not be a stressor for a different person, or even for the same person at another time...." Although a person may cope well, his or her perception of coping skills achievement may be poor, resulting in distress and a negative self image for no "objective" reason. Stress, by its very definition, is a complex psychological and physiological reaction that approaches or exceeds one's self-perceived ability to cope with certain environmental conditions. It is a kind of "challenge" that may or may not be met.

Several researchers including the author (1984, 1982, 1981) have identified significant sources of teacher stress. These include classroom management, role conflict, relationships with colleagues, and work overload (Friesen and Williams, 1985); political climate,

negative public support, and role definition (Ruddy, 1984); interaction with administrators and student pressures (Bartell, 1984); and uncertainty or inadequate mastery of the task, often evidenced by beginning teachers (Everett-Turner, 1984; Veenman, 1984). The presence of stress in beginning teachers is indirectly supported by Fergusson (1984), who found that experienced teachers have lower stress levels than less experienced ones. Although older elementary teachers frequently complain about such pressures as classroom management (McMurray, 1982b), they tend, like most principals, to be survivors. Our data from both elementary and secondary school principals in five Canadian Provinces have suggested that despite differences, neither group perceives itself to be the recipient of excessive stress. Indeed, the anecdotal comments of many secondary principals are particularly revealing in that they question the purpose of stress research at all. In contrast, beginning teachers express considerable concern about their own competence in the classroom. Young females, for example, associate stress with working in isolated communities.

The present research was initiated after in-depth discussions, with several chief education officers in large metropolitan Boards of Education, who have expressed concern about the possible work overload of some female teachers. It was suggested that they seem to evidence role conflicts generated by family expectations far beyond their ability to function comfortably in the classroom. Common sense suggests that, if a female teacher has the responsibilities of

marriage, a home, and a family, and a career, she may indeed perceive herself to be highly stressed. Further she may endeavour to cope with distress in a variety of ways.

Our research examined the degree to which women teachers purchase a variety of services available in their communities and whether they related the use of these "compensatory" services to their own perception of teaching as a stressful occupation. Further, an attempt was made to consider some of the demands of everyday living; to identify social and recreational activities engaged in; and to confirm some of the sources of family and other disagreement identified as stressful by other researchers.

Method

Self-report attitudinal questionnaires containing 26 items were mailed to a computer-selected, random sample of 940 elementary and secondary school principals in eight Western and Eastern Canadian Provinces. Each principal was mailed two questionnaires with instructions to give one to each of two female teachers on staff. Preferably, one teacher would have less than five year's experience and the other ten or more. Eleven hundred and twenty-eight (1128) questionnaires were returned from married and unmarried women teachers in the sample, yielding a return rate of 60%. For the purpose of some of the statistical analyses, the total number of data sets was reduced to 625 for married women and 195 for unmarried females. Demographic

data included size of community, nature of student body, size and grade of class taught, length of teaching experience, and size of school. Other data included religious preference, length of family residence in Canada, and languages other than English spoken in the home.

Non-demographic data provided opinions on spousal attitudes toward work and family responsibilities, estimates of the respondent's mental and physical fitness, and areas representative of likely family disagreements. Examples of possible disagreements included the handling of family finances, choice of friends, household tasks, and personal appearance. Attitudinal information included school environmental factors, elicited by a 10-item three part scale, ranging from no concern to extreme concern. The second attitudinal area concerned possible compensatory activities of a social/recreational nature. Examples of the content included in this 13-item, three-part scale include participation in physical exercise, hobbies and crafts, taking Ministry/University courses, and watching television. The third attitudinal area of inquiry examined the frequency and nature of services purchased by a female teacher as a means of reducing her overall feelings of responsibility and workload. Fourteen items examined the purchase of such services as domestic help, eating out, daycare, etc. The remainder of the questionnaire items provided information about paid work engaged in apart from teaching, time spent in school-based activities, health-related absences from school, and estimates of job satisfaction and overall teaching effectiveness.

Analyses and Discussion

The criterion variable in the present study revealed that only 17% of the female teachers in the study perceived their job as extremely stressful. Despite the skewed nature of the distribution of responses and the fact that 54% of the women said that their teaching was moderately stressful, the incidence of extreme stress recorded by our female respondents was lower than that of the sexually heterogeneous samples noted in Hiebert's survey of the literature. Although a distinction must be made between chronic and transitory stressors even within an interactional model perspective, careful observational research is needed to provide specific incidences of distress both within specific groups of teachers and between teachers and other professionals. We know that teaching is often a very lonely profession (Knoblock & Goldstein, 1971) and although the present study provides no comparative data with other helping professions, it is clear that a minority but still significant portion of teachers regard teaching as very stressful.

Demographically, 75% of the women respondents taught in Western Canada and the remainder in the East, exclusive of Ontario and Quebec. Rural and small communities were represented by 40% while 23% taught in cities with over 100,000 population. Fifty-three per cent of the students taught were rural, 19% core-area urban and 28% suburban. The sample reflected a variety of years of experience (34% had 1-5 years in the classroom and 24% had 16 years and more) in all grades (57%

taught Grades K-6; 19% grades 7-9; and 23% grades 10-12). The majority (77%) taught in small schools and only 5% in schools of 1000 students or more. Single women comprised 27% of the sample and, of these, 14% lived alone. Most of the remainder shared accommodation with a spouse (25%) or with a spouse and children (46%). As for religious preference, 59% were protestant, 28% catholic, 1% orthodox, 0% Jewish and 11% other. First generation Canadians made up 17% of the sample; 44% second generation and 40% other.

Not all of the demographic/descriptive data can be included here but the following are representative of the respondents. Only 4% regarded their physical health to be poorer than that of their age peers and only 3% felt their mental health to be poorer. Some 70% exercised regularly and were making a deliberate attempt to keep fit. Those that were married reported that their spouses regarded their teaching to be of a "long-term" nature, and 41% of the married respondents regarded themselves to be the "primary provider". Sixty-eight per cent worked for personal satisfaction. Less than 10% of all respondents engaged in additional paid work during either the school term or holiday breaks.

An analysis of the <u>time in hours</u> engaged in vocational responsibilities during a typical week at school is revealing: teaching, 25.1; preparation, 8.5; marking, 5.8; seeing students, 3.1; seeing parents, 1.6 and attending meetings, 3.2. When asked to check 10 sources of work-related distress, the two most frequently of

extreme concern were "time available for individual students" (41%) and "trying to upgrade student's skills/achievement" (42%). Yet when asked to compare their teaching effectiveness with other teachers in their school, none said they were poor teachers, 40% said they worked harder than most (none said less hard!) and 84% would still (again) choose teaching as a profession!

A single questionnaire item served as an index of perceived stress, following the model reviewed by Friesen and Williams (1985) and recommended by a number of recent investigators including Kyriakou (1980a; 1980b), and Jankovic (1981), who have established the reliability of such a procedure. Each of our respondents was asked to respond to the question: "Personally, how stressful do you find being a teacher?", on a four-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "extremely so." The responses of the women in our sample of married and unmarried teachers to this question constituted our criterion of perceived stress.

A principal components factor analyses with verimax rotation provided an empirical justification for selected a priori questionnaire items intended to measure job satisfaction and compensatory behaviors. The data were treated individually for the two groups of married and unmarried respondents, because some questions were applicable solely to one group, and some to the other. Factor loadings below .35 were rejected, and some item groups peculiar to the activities of single teachers were collapsed on the basis of

"face logic". Four scales were derived arbitrarily and were given the following descriptor names: (1, purchased services); (2, leisure-time activities); (3, pressure from work); and (4, encroachments upon free time). Following the identification of these four main factor groupings, a step-wise regression analysis relative to the criterion variable "Level of perceived stress" was applied. Because we were investigating whether the purchase of a variety of helping services would reduce the respondent's perception of experienced stress, the first variable was forced throughout the analysis, i.e., kept in the program. After that the program selected the most promising predictor to enter into the regression equation.

The zero-order correlations of each selected predictor to the stress criterion score presented in Table 1 suggest that pressure from work accounts for the most significant portion of the explored variability for both married and unmarried female respondents.

Insert Table 1 about here

Encroachments upon the time of single female teachers is suggestive but not overwhelming. The importance of work-related pressures to the perception of stress in teaching helps to account for the continuing attempts by other investigators to identify sources of distress in the work place. The initial assumption that the use frequency of engaged services might somehow compensate for the perception of experiencing either personal or job-related stressors is not supported. As a means

of clarifying the nature of data obtained in this investigation, however, categorized descriptive response data for all the female respondents are presented in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5. It may be seen in Table 2 that the following four of ten job-stressors appear to be of extreme concern to many women teachers: upgrading skills/achievement, 42%; finding time for work with individual students, 41%; the attitudes and behaviors of students, 38%, and the need to upgrade students values, 31%.

Insert Table 2 about here

Of little concern are such things as the inappropriateness of curricula, administrative duties or the school's disciplinary policies.

Insert Table 3 about here

One may reason that stress in the work place can be counterbalanced by a tranquil home life, an active and diverting social-recreational schedule and the purchase of services that reduce the over-all demands of a home and family. It may be seen in Table 3 that, from a menu of 19 sources of possible family disagreements, women teachers with children regard the following to be of greatest concern: the availability of free time, 21%; the efficient organization of time, 20%; sharing responsibility, 15%; and the pressures brought about by household tasks and being punctual, 14%.

Of relatively little concern are religious matters, choice of friends or meal-time occurrences.

Insert Table 4 about here

It is probably fair to conclude from an inspection of the respondents social and recreational activities, tabulated in Table 4, that they are typical of most busy middle class women who work. For the purposes of this paper, the responses of married and unmarried females have not been separated. Because many variables such as age, location, interest and opportunity compound the data, a more intensive investigation will be necessary to clarify the relationship of stress to voluntary recreational activities.

Insert Table 5 about here

Women teachers appear to avail themselves of a minimum of services with the money that they either earn or have available. From the array of possible compensatory services, presented in Table 5, only a few are used regularly by even a few of the respondents. Day-care is by far the most frequently purchased service, especially when one considers that these data are grouped and contain both married and single women. Housecleaning assistance is regularly purchased by 15% but is never purchased by 72%. Obtaining prepared foods or eating out were active occurrences for some but it is clear that most of the hard work of maintaining a home is carried out by the primary occupants

themselves. Whether they choose such duties or have them thrust upon them cannot be answered by this investigation.

One purpose of the present study was to relate the female respondents' scores on the stress criterion to years of teaching experience and thus, in most cases, to chronological age. In terms of our sample, 34% of the women had 1-5 year's experience; 20% had 6-10 year's; 22% had 11-15 year's; and 24% had 16 or more year's in teaching. Although the literature is by no means unanimous on this point (Pines, Aronson & Kafry, 1981), our own research (McMurray, 1981; 1982a; 1982b) has suggested that individuals within all age groups may for different reasons break down or burn out, but that on average distress decreases with age. In part this may be because older teachers are survivors or that some students who enter faculties of teacher education are weeded out before graduation or are unable to find jobs upon graduation. An analysis of variance between experience and the degree of perceived stress in this sample of married and single women as a group is presented in Figure I.

Insert Figure 1 about here

There appears to be a roughly linear inverse relationship between years of teaching experience and perceived distress. Beginning teachers clearly perceive their job to be more stressful than teachers with more experience. This supports the suggestion of Veenman (1984) that beginning teachers may experience considerable stress because of

their relative unfamiliarity with the demands of the job, with the nature of the students, and with the content of the curriculum. It also dispels the notion that older teachers generally experience more distress than younger ones. Although older teachers may indeed voice more concern about such things as student disorder and unsupportive administrators, generally speaking, "older professionals tend to be survivors", the most anxious having left teaching long ago. Although the compensations of youth and vigor and idealism in part offset the lack of experience of beginning teachers, there is no doubt there is still a real challenge for younger teachers in their first few years. The limited results of the present study do not support the original expectation that the purchase of a variety of home-making and other time-saving services per se reduces the perception of distress held by women teachers. It would seem that if a teacher is intrinsically anxious, than that anxiety will remain regardless of how many support services are provided in the environment. Individuals who are capable of a heavy workload seem to be able to withstand it, and those whose schedule is lighter, and less onerous, frequently express anxious feelings about it.

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Figure 1

Magnitude of self-perceived stress as a function of experience in teaching

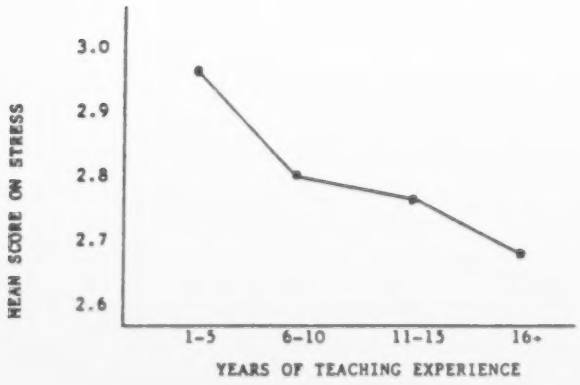

Table 1

Zero-order Correlation of Four Predictors with the Stress Criterion

Predictor	Married			Unmarried		
	r.	df	Sign.*	r.	df.	p
Purchased services	+.02	623		-.02	193	
Leisure activities	+.08	"		+.07	"	
Work pressure	+.37	"	**	+.43	"	**
Encroachments on time	-.11	"		-.20	"	*

*df = 200	.05 level requires	.14	.01 level requires	.18
500	" " "	.08	" " "	.115
1000	" " "	.06	" " "	.08

Coefficient of Determination (Guilford) = r2 = proportion of explained variability.

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Table 2

Concern Expressed by All Respondents
for Job-related Sources of Distress

	No Concern	Moderate Concern	Extreme Concern
Attitudes/behavior of your administrators	26%	55%	19%
Attitudes/behavior of parents	19%	62%	20%
Attitudes/behavior of students	9%	53%	38%
Time available for individual students	8%	51%	41%
Noisy pupils	23%	54%	23%
The school's disciplinary policies	38%	46%	16%
Trying to upgrade students' values	11%	59%	31%
Trying to upgrade skills/achievement	5%	53%	42%
Rigid/inappropriate curricula	43%	47%	11%
Administrative duties	42%	49%	10%

Table 3

Concern Expressed by Women with Children
for Family-related Sources of Disagreements

	No Concern	Mild Concern	Extreme Concern
Handling family finances	46%	45%	10%
Matters of recreation	62%	36%	2%
Religious matters	77%	10%	4%
Choice of friends	68%	28%	4%
Values - things you feel are important	42%	45%	13%
Dealing with parents/in-laws	54%	36%	10%
Mealtime	68%	28%	4%
Managing children	49%	40%	11%
Sharing responsibilities	38%	47%	15%
Household tasks	36%	50%	14%
Career decisions	60%	31%	10%
Needing time alone	48%	40%	12%
Working closely with others	65%	33%	3%
Personal appearance	52%	40%	8%
Being punctual	50%	36%	14%
Attending church	75%	20%	6%
Having free time	32%	47%	21%
Organizing time efficiently	31%	49%	20%
Getting away with friends	52%	41%	7%

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Table 4

Nature and Frequency of Social/recreational
Leisure-time Activities Chosen by All Respondents

	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Physical exercise/health clubs	38%	36%	27%
Attend church	38%	29%	33%
Go out for dinner	27%	70%	3%
Go to movies/theatre	13%	70%	18%
Date	27%	25%	58%
Play sports	21%	47%	32%
Entertain friends	32%	65%	2%
Hobbies/crafts	32%	54%	14%
Take ministry/university courses	15%	50%	36%
Travel	25%	67%	8%
Weekend trips	19%	70%	11%
Music/drama/arts participation	16%	42%	42%
Television	36%	59%	6%

Table 5

Frequency of Use of "Compensatory Services"
Purchased by Women Teachers

	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Domestic help: full-time	4%	1%	95%
Domestic help: part-time	8%	8%	84%
Laundry services	4%	9%	87%
Using "fast foods" in the home	9%	71%	70%
Eating "fast foods" outside the home	7%	75%	18%
Eating in restaurants	17%	74%	9%
Purchased baked goods	17%	62%	21%
Taking guests out for dinner	3%	40%	57%
House-cleaning	15%	13%	72%
Day-care (during teaching)	21%	5%	74%
"Baby-sitters" (other times)	9%	26%	65%
Lawn/garden care	6%	12%	82%
Snow removal	5%	11%	84%

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